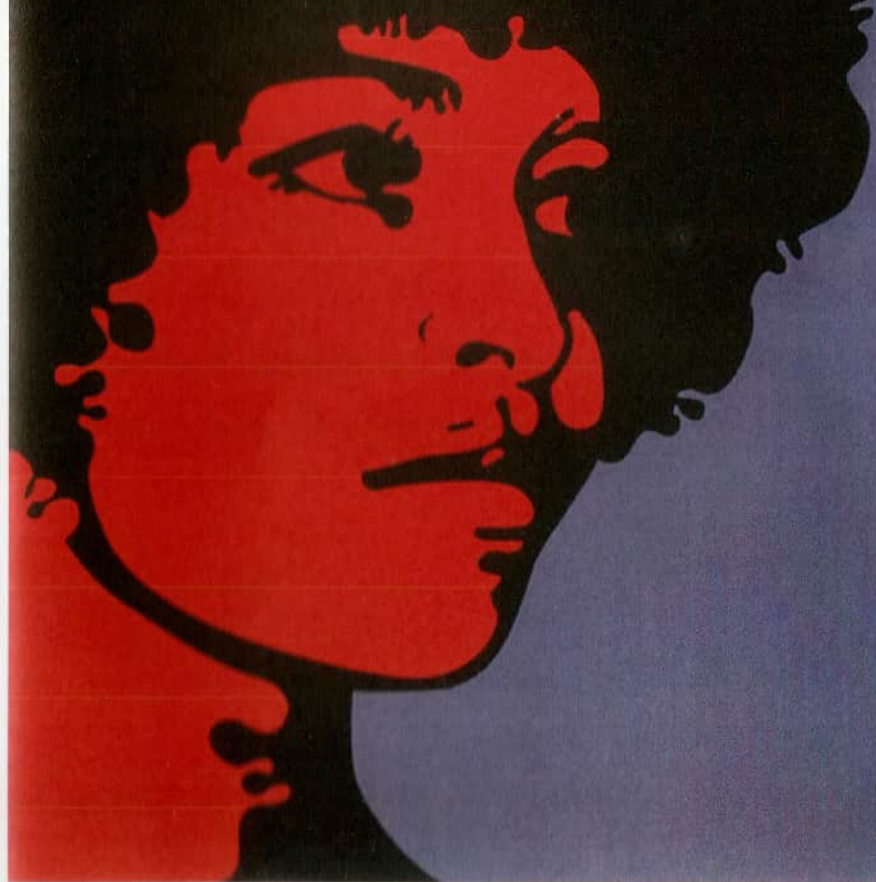


Women Class & Revolution!

a Fightback pamphlet
by Kassie Hartendorp



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Safer Spaces in Political Organising

by Kassie Hartendorp is a Fightback member, founding activist of the Queer Avengers, and works as a youth worker for a queer youth organisation. This article is adapted from a talk presented at the Fightback annual conference.

What is a safe space?

As background, safe spaces began in forms such as consciousness-raising groups within the second wave feminist movement. These were spaces which allowed women to openly discuss the discrimination or abuse they were subjected to and strategise ways to fight against issues relating to sexism. The safety of these spaces was important as they provided an opportunity for women to come to terms with issues such as domestic violence or sexual abuse, within a supportive environment. They were also a space that addressed the issue of male domination within wider political groups and as such, often excluded men with the intention to minimise the chances of abuse or marginalization, so that those involved could move forward in their fight against oppression.

Nowadays, safe spaces are often associated with the women's movement and the queer community. They were formed on the basis that women and queer people were often not physically safe within mainstream groups, and in these environments, people could feel confident expressing their identity or just existing without the threat of violence or verbal abuse.

Identities are complex:

When we create groups, organisations or movements, we often rally under one banner as a way to easily communicate our cause to the public. Even in groups which are brought together over a common identity, or to fight a cause related to that identity (e.g women's liberation), these groups are never homogenous. The Occupy movement used the powerful slogan that 'we are the 99 percent,' but this kind of rhetoric, which brings people together, should recognise that not everyone comes from the same background or identity and most importantly, this is in no way a bad thing. Differences are often treated as threats, something that needs to be reconciled and normalised within a familiar culture. This quote from Audre Lorde, a self-styled "black, lesbian, mother, warrior and poet," suggests an alternative to this fear of difference:

"Without community there is no liberation... but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist. Differences must not be merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic."



**AUDRE
LORDE**

It sounds cheesy, but our differences can be our strengths, and those who are considered different should be valued, for if an organization cannot be dynamic, ever-changing and accommodating, then it will stagnate and become irrelevant.

After accepting that no activist community is a homogenous group, we have to do more to actually address and accommodate those differences. The issue would be simple if those differences had not been carved out through decades or centuries of oppression and marginalization. We could probably tread around and work through these differences much easier, if they were not entrenched in historical or current pain, hardship and suffering. We could work through this, if certain groups had not been consistently ignored, dismissed or silenced. Not to mention, abused, violated or harassed. To navigate the way through any complexities related to oppression is extremely difficult at the best of times, and especially if you are in the minority group.

Why do we need solidarity?

Many of us subscribe to theories that are centuries old, but it doesn't mean that our practices have to be outdated. Being aware of oppression, marginalization and issues such as accessibility isn't compromising our politics; it is making sure we have a space that is welcome to all types of people. The ones who face the most oppression are the ones who often understand the problems of capitalism the best – they have been shunned, rejected or mistreated by the rigid structures of our current system. But it is also a matter of principle. What kind of society are we wanting to create, if it does not recognise and value difference?

It's also a matter of principle if you follow the adage that 'an injury to one is an injury to all.' The ruling class thrives on difference and uses it to divide the working class. This doesn't mean we shouldn't recognize our differences, it means that we should not let anyone be attacked by a system that is based on divisive and exploitative tactics and use those differences against us. Because that will make any chance of resistance even weaker.

Wolf talks about a case in the 1930s, with the National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards; a reactionary union that was transformed in large part, by the communists involved, into a staunchly progressive force. The union was considered to have a high level of racial diversity with many gay workers. "Workers learnt from their own experience that if they didn't welcome the Blacks, gays and others into their ranks, the bosses would use racism and homophobia to divide them and bust their union." This led to the MCS taking a strong stand in supporting those who were black or gay in

the union, and ended up winning serious material gains. Hall writes that their union was known for their door which had a large sign saying "Race-baiting, Red-baiting and Queen-baiting is Anti-Union."

Now, not every union was or is this progressive, however, it highlights the fact that in this case, an injury to one worker, based on their race or sexuality, was recognized as being an attack on the workers as a whole. And with that understanding, those 'minorities' were defended, to the benefit of the majority.

As political activists, especially ones aware of class struggle, we need to be taking the same view. We need to have solidarity with those who are affected by homophobia, racism, transphobia, sexism, ableism and other prejudices, because an attack on them by the capitalist machine, is an attack on us all. We need to be raising the political level, isolating the backwards who are actively against social change, and working with those in the more advanced layers to build awareness of oppression and how it functions as a tool to attack and divide us all.

Easier said than done....

Anyone who has been in a group that has different elements knows that this a job far easier said than done. But I believe the first step, is creating environments in our own organizations that function as a safer space. If we cannot have a group that looks after our own, and shows solidarity in an internal sense, we can't really be offering the same solidarity outside the group, or it just becomes lip service. We need to recognize when issues of sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or racism come up, and address them so as to not let such unprincipled sentiments corrode the group, and drive people away in disillusionment.

As a general principle, safe spaces are easy enough to set up, but extremely difficult to maintain, and very simple to undermine. As such, it is problematic to label or imagine any group as a 'safe space', but we can always be aiming to work on elements that make our group 'safer.'

The problem with most safe spaces is that the safety in itself becomes the aim of the group, rather than the goal of achieving safety, equality and liberation for all in the external world. Patton writes this of identity politics, which is a useful way of looking at groups that focus wholly on creating the ultimate safe space:

"The aim of identity politics is not human liberation or even an end to oppression, but the creation of cultural spaces where oppressed groups can express themselves freely."



Political groups have different goals to support groups, although these must sometimes overlap

Now, it is important that there are spaces that provide the opportunity for marginalized groups to be able to express themselves freely, and indeed any political group that does not allow for free expression is certainly a problem. But a group that focuses solely on self-expression as an end point, should take the form of a support group, rather than a political group.

Support groups need to be spaces where people who are abused, discriminated against or marginalized can go and receive appropriate assistance. Examples include groups such as School's Out or Tranzform which are spaces that provide queer and trans youth a safe haven that allows them to freely be themselves and explore their sexual or gender identity without any negative consequences.

Political groups have different goals to support groups, although these must sometimes overlap

However, political groups or movements have a different goal and that is to change the current conditions through education and organisation. At the same time, groups can, and need to be supportive – the fight is often long and hard, and we band together because we know we cannot do it on our own. Our groups will often attract the people who have truly felt discrimination or oppression in their own lives. But, there needs to be clarity around what your group is trying to achieve.

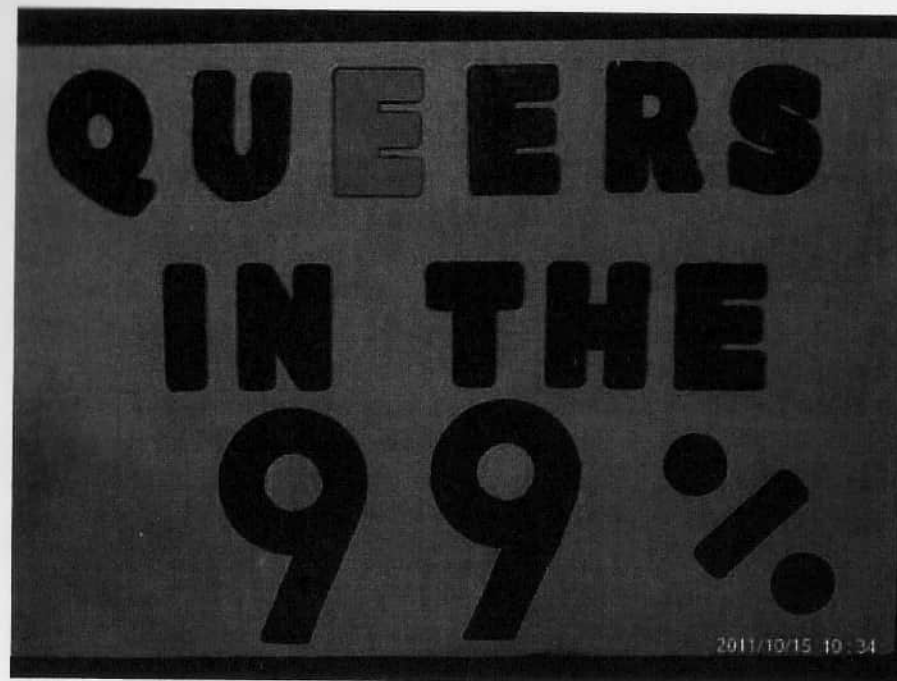


The Queer Avengers are a queer activist group.

In a political group that runs campaigns and the like, you can never have an ultimately safe space. It just isn't possible. If your goal is to engage with a wider group such as workers or the general public, then you will constantly be encountering those who either have little understanding of oppression, or who are outright hostile to marginalized groups. It's often said by proponents of safe spaces that it is not the responsibility of the oppressed to educate the oppressor. While this is true to an extent, education is important political work and has to be treated as important in its own right.

When I gave this presentation last, one person raised the valid point that the political and personal have huge crossover and are never easy to compartmentalize into separate, tidy boxes. Furthermore, the sharing of personal stories can help qualitatively grow and develop a group, through new understanding and stronger connections. I definitely agree with this, and also think that somebody's mental and physical health and able-bodiedness, or experiences free of certain types of oppression, gives them an advantage over what they can keep personal or political.

We also cannot rule out the importance of the personal as a tactic within groups. As an example, The Queer Avengers needed a session to orientate its kaupapa, so we asked everyone to prepare and share the reason why they come along to the group or why they wanted to be a queer activist. What I, at least, never expected, was the



immense emotional experience that this brought. People shared their stories of being bullied, non-acceptance, abuse, mental health and suicide attempts. It was one of the most powerful gatherings I have ever been to, and that power directly came from the sharing of personal experience. It crystallised why we were organizing, and created new threads of understanding and warmth towards each other, which are necessary for the solid foundations of long lasting, cohesive group. Not to make it sound mega clinical, but to share and acknowledge the personal here is a tactical move that is a means to fighting queerphobia as an overall strategy. If the strategy is merely to share and discuss the personal, then that will distinctly change the way the group orientates and operates.

One thing to note is that to include some who are actively opposed to any progressive political change, it often means you exclude others. In Occupy Wellington, the idea of the 99% was used to justify the inclusion of people who were acting oppressively. Some even argued that members of the National Front were part of the 99%. It was only through active opposition, seen by some as divisive, that a General Assembly agreed National Front members would not be welcome.

During the events last year, many critiques were made of the Occupy sites which

were unfriendly, unaware and often hostile to women, and queer participants in a space that was meant to be fighting against oppression. Because of the absent or flawed processes for dealing with these issues, many people who were genuinely interested in creating change ended up leaving out of disillusionment.

It's not just external engagement that can compromise a political 'safe space' however. The most difficult struggles are usually those that take place at an internal level, among members of your own group or organisation. The fact is, even if we have the best intentions, and a thorough understanding of oppression or inequality, we have all been taught how to behave or think by the same machine. Not many of us have the opportunity to be raised in an idyllic commune that breaks down traditional norms of how we view race, gender, sexuality or able-bodiedness. But most of us are participating within groups that aim to challenge dominant ideas and achieve the liberation of all.

Some approaches in the attempt to create a safe space include turning a magnifying glass on their own members and their behaviour, monitoring each action and calling people up to 'check their privilege.' While I do think that every person should be honest and self-critical about their own experiences, I think this approach elevates individual behaviour over social transformation. None of us are perfect, but most importantly; we are socialized in ways that reinforce oppression.

Some approaches prioritise individual behaviour over social transformation

However, there are some forms of behavior that are simply unacceptable, and within a political group, there needs to be a way of addressing this. Some acts or attitudes take place within the group, and are easier to deal with. If a person is obviously being prejudiced, it could be racist comments, or constantly talking over women in a group, then there needs to be a process for how the group deals with it. To ignore it, is to foster a culture that accepts the very marginalization that we as activists should be standing up against. Depending on the extent of the behavior, I think it is important that any critiques are put forward in a comradely way. Sometimes people don't realize that they are being offensive or oppressive, but at the same time, there needs to be a hard line maintained that certain acts are not acceptable within a political organization.

There are more extreme or complex cases that must be dealt with extra care. A situation which many activists face, is when other members perpetrate unacceptable behaviour outside of the groups they are involved in. As an example, a person who sexually or physically abuses their partner. This is a far more difficult situation to deal

with, and requires a more sensitive approach. It is one thing to set guidelines around the behaviour that is expected in your organisation, and another to try and control behaviour of someone in what is considered 'their own time.' At the same time, groups need to be open to dealing with and supporting the affected through ongoing damaging behaviour. The only thing that I will note, is that it is very important that the choices and wishes of those at the hands of abuse is held as the most significant deciding factor on how to go forward.

Other options can include setting up contact people or a disputes committee that is there to field any issues that come up within the group. It goes without saying that this individual or group needs to be genuinely prepared to confront these issues. Those who bring them up need to not be treated as 'divisive' or their complaints relegated as secondary to the primary concern such as 'class', or dismissed for the sake of a false unity. Other ways of dealing with oppressive behavior that people may have heard of include community accountability models. I personally don't have any experience with this, but would love to look at ways this could take shape in our own communities.

One way of seeing a safe space in a political organisation, is building a culture that has an active awareness of how oppression works, and the ability or processes to be able to deal with challenges to that space if they arise. This requires education which must be addressed at a group and individual level. This doesn't mean waving a Consent is Sexy leaflet in peoples' faces, it means having meaningful and educative discussions on what oppression looks like. These are hard discussions to have, and often you may feel that it has had no impact whatsoever. But as Mao pointed out, without internal struggle, an organization is dead. No space will ever be the perfect utopian safe space. But it is possible to deal with most issues as they arise in a comradely and constructive fashion. It also must be said, that if we cannot engage with the most 'advanced' layers of politically conscious people, then how are we expected to persuade the general masses why we need to achieve the human liberation of all?

Political spaces in general need to be safe but also actively moving forward and addressing issues as they arise. When people feel marginalized or are made to feel culturally, physically or emotionally unsafe, they will usually just leave, rather than making an attempt to change the culture of a group. For this reason, efforts need to be made to check in, evaluate, self-critique and modify norms as the need arises.



Angela Davis speaking at an Occupy rally

Conclusion

We have discussed the need for solidarity and creating safer spaces within our political organizations. This article will not necessarily apply to all groups, but hopefully some of this will spark the need to critically evaluate and creatively move forward in a way that is genuinely inclusive. This will be different for each group, but the need to create spaces that openly confront oppression is important for the advancement of any 'movement.'

As Angela Davis asked during her Occupy speech, "How can we be together in a unity that is not simplistic and oppressive? How can we be together in a unity that is complex and emancipatory?" Our groups and structures cannot remain the same as they have over the past 100 years, as our communities and identities change and evolve. We need to be working together at a collective level, regardless of difference, but this needs to be done in a way that does not leave behind any group or community on a systematic basis. This is far more difficult than it sounds, but without addressing this, our groups will function in an unprincipled way that does not truly fight against the structures and social relations that have us wanting out of capitalism in the first place.

Basic tips for creating safer spaces:

1. Make it clear in your constitution or guidelines that certain behaviours are unacceptable.
2. Have a clear process or grievance procedure for what happens if someone is acting in a way that is oppressive towards certain groups. This also means having consequences for those who act against the guidelines.
3. Do be aware of power imbalances – you can't always erase them, but they need to be transparent.
4. If you have open meetings, make sure they are genuinely open to the majority of people. You cannot please everyone all of the time, but endeavour to eliminate as many barriers as possible.
5. This can include holding meetings at accessible venues, offering forms of childcare, ensuring there are accessible and non-gendered facilities such as restrooms and holding them at times which are convenient for the majority of people rather than just one group.
6. Make sure you give people the chance to speak. While most new members take a while to adjust, if someone doesn't appear to be feeling comfortable enough to talk during meetings, try and explore why.
7. Try to have rounds as a tactical means of discussion so that everyone has the option to speak, and keep speaking orders that ensure the same voices do not dominate meetings.
8. Ensure that you build a space based on respect. This means respect of peoples' identities, their physical and emotional boundaries and limits, and respect of peoples' opinions and beliefs.
9. Take care of each other. Be observant and supportive. If someone doesn't come back to meetings, check in with them in a respectful way, and be prepared to address any criticism that may come up.

Revisiting socialism and women's liberation

by Kassie Hartendorp

Historically, one of the most controversial topics within Marxist theory is 'the woman question' which continues to create debate and disagreement within socialist politics. August Bebel defines the woman question as dealing "with the position that woman should hold in our social organism, and seeks to determine how she can best develop her powers and her abilities, in order to become a useful member of human society, endowed with equal rights and serving society according to her best capacity." Because the demand for women's rights is often seen to conflict with the priority of class struggle, some Marxists have refrained from tackling this topic, as it has not been uncommon for groups to split over disagreements on how to end women's oppression. In this article we will review four writers; Frederick Engels, August Bebel, Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai and analyse what they have put forward in regards to women's suffrage, marriage and the family, motherhood and love, and sexuality. This is only a small selection of the plethora of issues within the woman question, but due to word restraints, I will be just discussing these four areas. We choose here to use the term 'women's oppression' rather than the more recently used 'gender inequality'. While the terms are similar, the former is the historically specific description of the oppression and exploitation of women within the longer trajectory of capitalism.

Women's Suffrage

Women's suffrage is often associated with first-wave feminism, but the well-known suffragists of the Western world were not the only ones demanding change within the electoral system. Most socialist groups agreed that women should be given full political rights, which included the right to vote and to be elected to public office, however, these matters were treated in terms of whether or not they were prioritised. Clara Zetkin, a German socialist active from the late 1870s through until the early

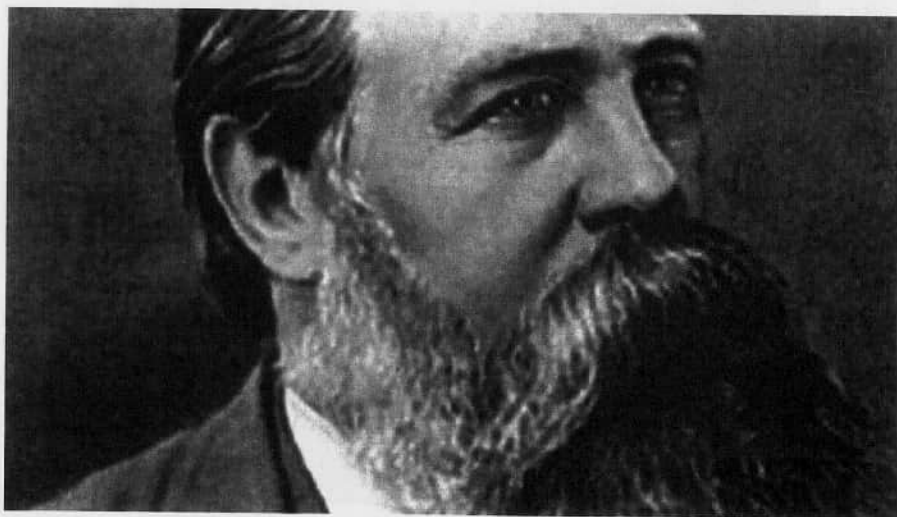


Clara Zetkin and her close friend Rosa Luxemburg attend an international women's day rally

1930s) was devoted to the issue of women's suffrage, arguing that it was of utmost importance for socialist organisations to demand voting rights for women. Women did not gain the vote in Germany until 1918, and Zetkin was a key figure in forming a socialist women's movement that fought for women's political equality. Her paper "Social Democracy and Woman Suffrage" was given as a speech to the Conference of Women before the opening of the Annual Congress of the German Social-Democracy in 1906 (when 'social democracy' was a term still in use to describe revolutionary socialism).

Using the Marxist method of historical materialism to analyse the fight for women's rights, Zetkin began her speech by stating that women's suffrage is a "direct consequence of the capitalist mode of production." She linked women's oppression, and the fight for gender equality back to the idea that all social relations and structures are based on the mode of production, and without surplus-value, and the rise of capitalism, both the conditions of women, and their fight for equality, would not exist.

Zetkin went on to say that the middle-class agitation movement – or what would be described now as first-wave feminism – demands that women's suffrage be granted because it is a 'natural right.' In contrast, Zetkin stated that: "We, on the contrary, basing our demand on the teachings of economics and of history, advocate the suffrage for women as a social right, which is not based on any natural right, but which rests on social, transient conditions." Here she differentiated the socialist struggle for



German Marxist Frederick Engels was an early advocate for women's liberation.

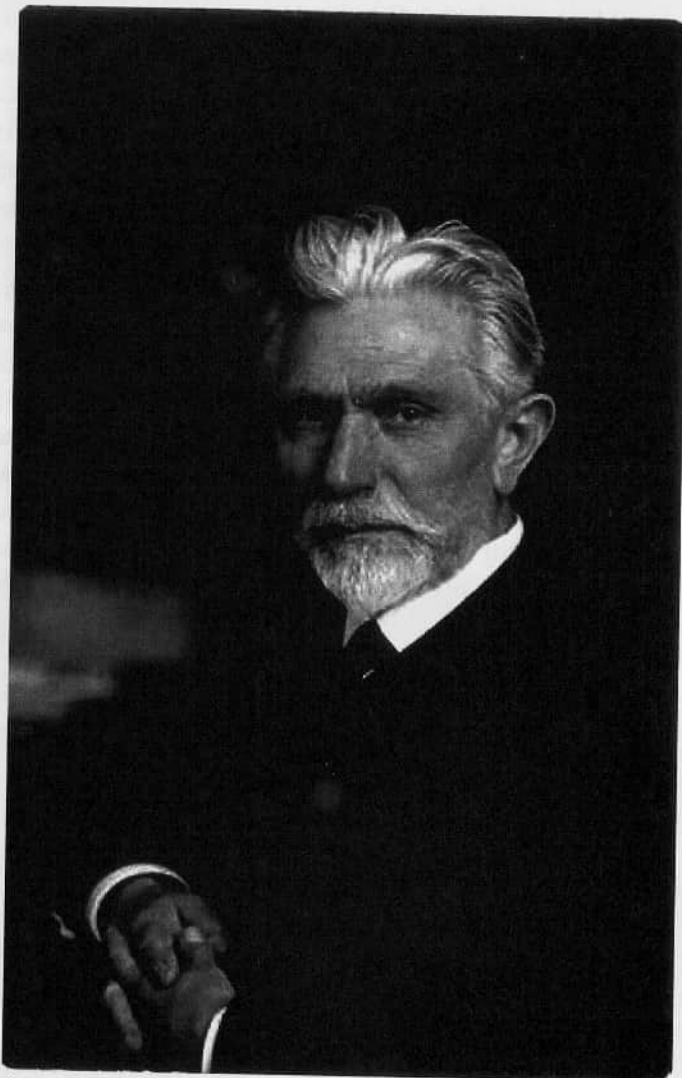
women's rights, from that of the bourgeois women's movement by punctuating the understanding the world through the theoretical foundation of Marxism – dialectical materialism.

Engels described the materialist dialectic as the "cycle in which every finite mode of existence of matter, whether it be sun or nebular vapour, single animal or genus of animals, chemical combination or dissociation, is equally transient, and wherein nothing is eternal but eternally changing, eternally moving matter and the laws according to which it moves and changes." It is the idea that nothing is static, and that everything, including social and economic structures, is constantly in a process of motion. Within the first part of her paper, Zetkin has immediately stated her viewpoint on the issue as coming from Marxist theory, which sets her apart from first-wave feminists who were working towards the same goals, but from a different theoretical and practical standpoint.

Zetkin continued by stating why, in her opinion, women should be given the vote. She argues that because of capitalism, and the poverty that it brings, many women have a harder time giving birth to, and raising children in such conditions. Of this she states that "the demand for Woman Suffrage is only a phase of the demand that their high social worth should be more adequately recognised." In this sense she believes that women are not idle, thoughtless creatures as was predominantly thought at this time, but rather they contribute to society as much as men do but in a different way. Her argument continued that women should be recognised for this contribution and should therefore be allowed to vote for their political leaders, as well as stand for office. Zetkin goes on to argue from the perspective of difference feminism, by stating that she believes men and women are different in physical strength, and what she calls, "spiritual insight and intellectual aims." However she follows this assertion up with the line: "to be different does not necessarily imply inferiority, and if it be true that we think, act, and feel differently, then we say that this is another reason which condemns the action of men in the past, and a reason why we should try and improve society." Here she argued that due to their peaceful, nurturing nature, women would bring something different to society once they had achieved political equality. More recent history has shown that women are just as capable of performing aggressively when in positions of public office but during the period that she was agitating her view was not uncommon, and many first-wave feminists argued from a similar perspective.

Zetkin went on to discuss her own reasoning for fighting for women's rights. She addressed the conference by saying: "Comrades, I declare that the strongest and great-

est demand for women's rights is not due to the increase of wealth among women, but that it is based on the poverty, on the need, on the misery of the great mass of women." In this line she is linked women's oppression to the wider class struggle, and identified that it is the masses of women in poverty that need political equality the most and are currently fighting for it, in order to change the system that exploits them both as workers, and as women. She elaborates on this further in the passage:



August Bebel's book *Women and Socialism*, was a key text in the 19th century arguing for women's liberation

The working women demand the Suffrage, not only to defend their economic and moral interests of life, but they wish for it not only as a help against the oppression of their class by men, and they are particularly eager for it in order to aid in the struggle against the capitalist classes. And they ask for this social reform not in order to prop up the middle class society and the capitalist system. We demand equal political rights with men in order that, with them, we may together cast off the chains which bind us, and that we may thus overthrow and destroy this society.

In the above, Zetkin identified women's suffrage as a reform, rather than a final outcome. From a socialist perspective, the vote will not be used to prop up the capitalism, but must help to overthrow it. This is the major difference between socialist feminism and bourgeois feminism, in that the latter is often only looking to make reforms to the current system, with the political and legal equality of women being the end outcome. Socialist feminists on the other hand, see such equalities as being necessary reforms that help to ease the oppression of women, but that only through social revolution it can be abolished in its entirety. It is important to note that in the above passage, Zetkin also appeals to the idea of class unity, and that women and men must not be divided in the fight for women's rights, but rather that they must work together to bring about a truly egalitarian society.

August Bebel (also a long-serving leader within German social democracy) was also a strong advocate for women's suffrage and devoted a chapter to the topic in his book *Women and Socialism*. First written in 1879, this book is a key text on the position of women in society, its contents still relevant. Bebel firmly believed that women must be given both the right to vote, and the right to be elected to office. During this time, men across the Western world were for the most part, strongly opposed to these demands for a variety of reasons, including that women belonged in the domestic sphere, that women were biologically emotionally unstable and unable to vote, as well as the idea that they were just uninterested in and unfit for political life.

He reasoned that women contribute to the community just as much as the men who risk their lives to defend the country. He pointed out that the number of women who die during childbirth, or whose health is detrimentally affected because of it, is far greater than those men who die or are wounded on the battlefield. This was one of the reasons why women should be "entitled to full equality with man. He was responding to the argument from anti-suffragists that women did not risk their lives during war, and were therefore not entitled to the vote. Bebel's reasoning was similar to Zetkin's in that it emphasised women's social worth and why they deserve political equality. Again, this perspective differs to that of first-wave feminists, as it does not come from

the standpoint that the vote is a 'natural right' and rather that women had earned it in those social conditions.

For the feminists, the achievement of equal rights with men within the framework of the contemporary capitalist world is a concrete 'end in itself'; for proletarian women equal rights is merely a means to be used in the continuing struggle against the economic enslavement of the working class.

Like Zetkin, Kollontai has a contrasting view to first-wave feminists, as the priority for socialist feminists is first and foremost, to bring about a social revolution. Electoral rights are simply seen as a necessary reform to be used into order to achieve this goal. This differs to 'liberal' feminism, as the basis for their work, is predominantly to gain equality with men. However, the socialist feminist's demands do not stop there, and call for a complete re-organisation of society. Their answer to women's oppression lays in Kollontai's question:

Political rights, access to the election booth and a seat in parliament – this is the real aim of the bourgeois women's movement. But can political equality in the context of the retention of the entire capitalist-exploiter system free the working woman from that abyss of evil and suffering which pursues and oppresses her both as a woman and as a human being?

Political equality for women is not the only thing that people need to be fighting for and it needs to be tied into the wider class struggle. She also drew attention to the intersecting oppressions that a working-class woman of her time was forced to endure. The proletarian woman is not simply oppressed by men, but by capitalist relations of production and the capitalist state, and to truly be free she must throw off her chains from both oppressors.

Marriage and the Family

One of the most widely discussed topics in regard to socialist feminism is the institution of family and more specifically marriage. Karl Marx's friend and co-thinker Frederick Engels wrote *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State* (1884), which was his only substantial work on the position of women. Ideas contained in *The Origin...* are considered to be the definitive communist answer to women's oppression within the domestic sphere. Engels started his argument by tracing history back to locate the reasons for women's oppression. He drew from anthropologist and sociologist J.J. Bachofen's study on matriarchal clans to show evidence of

woman's higher social position in the ancient world. Engels analysed Bachofen's view that humans originally lived in a state of sexual promiscuity which meant that descent was only traced through the female line, which is described as "mother-right." Women were the only known parents, and it was said that this secured them a higher social position within their society. However, this changed when monogamy came about, which expected a woman to surrender herself for a limited period with a man, in order to create certainty of a child's lineage. This theory, since subjected to much criticism, has formed the basis for Marxist thought on the role of women in history.

Engels expanded on this theory by tying the establishment of private property to the demise of the mother-right; the combination of the two he argued, lowered women's status. The development of cattle-breeding, metalworking, weaving and agriculture provided families with a surplus, which led to concentrated private wealth within kinship groups. There became a sexual division of labour in which men obtained the food and owned all the tools or machinery used for this process. This meant that the man was the owner of new sources of subsistence, including cattle, and later slaves. Engels stated that because the male's children could not inherit this wealth, mother-right was abolished and he asserted that this "overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex." He continues by saying after this event, "man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of his children."

Engels developed this argument further by placing emphasis on the role that monogamy has to play in the institutional oppression of women. The monogamous tradition was "based on the supremacy of the man" and originated from the "concentration of a considerable wealth in the hands of a single individual – a man- and from the need to bequeath this wealth to the children of that man and no other." As with the later analysis of Zetkin and Bebel, historical materialism was used as the framework to assess the oppression of women.

Without both the establishment of private property and the surplus that families could now create, there would be no concentrated wealth that men possessed to pass on to their children, meaning that monogamy would not have become the most common marriage type. The monogamous marriage was described by Engels as often turning into a crass form of prostitution, "sometimes of both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piece-work as a wage-worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery." Needless to say, this is a very strong statement which postulated that the

difference is that a prostitute will sell her sexual labour for an agreed upon price on many separate occasions, whereas upon marrying, a woman has entered into a financial transaction where her body has been sold to her husband for an indefinite period, in exchange for economic security.

Although this seems like an extreme comparison to make; the idea that a woman belonged completely to her husband was commonplace and still survives. The fact that rape within marriage was legal in most countries until the late 1970s is ample evidence of this. The laws stemming from the legalisation of spousal rape are traceable to a Chief Justice in England during the 17th century who said that a husband cannot be guilty of rape of his wife "for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto the husband which she cannot retract." This view was not uncommon, and was still prevalent up to the 20th century. Engels argued that in this way, marriage is based on the oppression of women.

Engels believed that it was necessary to create social equality between husband and wife, and that the first condition for the 'liberation' of the wife was to bring all women back into public industry. He wrote "the emancipation of women will only be possible when women can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time." Time has shown that Engels was correct on this point, as with more women in the workforce, and technological development in the household, women have indeed become more liberated, and are not as financially dependent on men. The second and most contested condition that Engels put forward was the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society. This depends on the transfer of the means of production into common ownership, where the single nuclear family ceases to be necessary. Engels proposed that once housework, childcare and education become a social industry women will have more time to participate in the public sphere, meaning they will not need to enter marriage for economic reasons. He concluded this stating that the full freedom of marriage cannot be established until capitalist production has been abolished as well as the property relations created by it. Only then people will begin to get married only because of mutual inclination. Engels' analysis of women's oppression is predominantly linked to economics. Only with a radical change to the social and economic system could full gender equality can be achieved.

August Bebel argued many of the same points as Engels, in *Women and Socialism*. His book is said to have been read more widely than *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and The State*, but is now less well-known. Like Engels, Bebel also believed that marriage under capitalism is nothing more than sexual slavery, and ac-

knowledges that women have a double load to bear, because of both their economic dependence on men and their social dependence due to their "inferior position allotted to them in society." He also recognised that proletarian women suffer from these inequalities more than their middle-class counterparts.

Bebel was stronger in his views on women's oppression and could be described as more explicitly feminist than Engels. He stated that whatever the similarities between the proletarian woman and man, woman has one precedent over the working man, in that she was "the first human being who came into servitude." From the progressive and pro-feminist socialist men, there were still a great number who did not think that women's rights were a priority, and that the exploitation of workers was the main form of oppression to be combatted. To have a man writing specifically about women, was no small matter, and the book itself stirred many women into taking feminist action.

In regards to offering an answer to the marriage problem, Bebel tends to employ an 'after the revolution' solution in the conclusion of his title. He writes that in a new socialist society, a woman is free in the choice of love as a man, as marriage will become a union of "private agreement, without the interference of a functionary" and will reinstate what "generally prevailed before private property dominated society" but on a higher level of civilisation and under a different form. He continues by saying that the abolition of private property and inheritance laws will make women truly free and that instead of impairing on this freedom, the birth and care of her children will only add to her pleasure in life. Although Bebel's solution seems plausible if you agree with the idea of socialism, his argument still seems grounded in the idea that once society has achieved a social revolution, everyone will be free, and that it is a matter of waiting until this happens before women can be emancipated. This type of view has been problematic within socialist and Marxist theory. Social institutions and subsequent cultural attitudes should constantly be challenged in order to bring about positive social change to those yet to be fully liberated.

Three decades after Bebel and Engels, Alexandra Kollontai focused on the way that capitalism individualises social relations. She wrote in *Society and Motherhood* that capitalism maintains a system of individual economies and that the family specifically exists as an independent economic unit concerned with consumption (in the case of the urban family). This unit involves both "the uneconomic expenditure of products and fuel on the part of small domestic economies" and "unproductive labour, especially by women in the home." What Kollontai is arguing for is a more efficient economy that is focused on collective social consumption, as opposed to the



Alexandra Kollontai was a leading member of the Russian Bolsheviks and wrote heavily on the question of women's liberation

present individualised system. Once domestic labour is socialised under Kollontai's envisioned communist society, there would be no need for the family as we know it now, as jobs such as laundry, cooking and childcare are integrated into the public sphere. Once again, women's emancipation is linked to freeing up women's time for actual socialised labour, which can be achieved with a transformation of the current family structure.

Motherhood

Rarely discussed by male socialist theorists, Kollontai furthered the analysis of motherhood from a Marxist perspective. She identified the existence of the 'motherhood problem' whereby both woman and child both suffer under a state that does not provide for them or protect them. Abortions were illegal, contraception scarce or unreliable, and social securities such as paid parental leave didn't register. Most working class women were forced to continue in their paid work straight after childbirth in order to earn the subsistence necessary for the family's survival. Kollontai linked the problem of motherhood with that of labour and the living conditions of the working class when she asked:

Will the mother and child gain any significant benefit from the introduction of relatively comprehensive protection if the working woman is subjected for the rest of the time to unrestricted exploitation by capital, if her working day is so long as to sap her strength, and the whole of the working class exists permanently on the edge of starvation?

Here she argued that although reforms that help protect mothers are necessary, they must go hand in hand with a transformation of the relations of production. This is an example of the intersection of both women's liberation and the class struggle, and is indicative of revolutionary socialist theory, rather than reform-focused liberalism. Although it is important that women and children get provided for by the state, there is still the issue of poverty that will not disappear without a radical restructuring. Kollontai traced the concept of the family back to when it was a productive unit that required new members in order to help with the share of labour. During that period it could be argued that the individual upbringing of a child was economically justified, but because the modern family unit has no such requirements within developed capitalism, there seems to be no reason for keeping all responsibility for the new generation within this private unit. Therefore, Kollontai argued that once the outdated family unit has ceased to exist, the responsibility of raising children will transfer to the entire community.

Until such time, she had concrete plans (that she attempted to implement during her time on the Central Committee of the CPSU) for how to progress in regards to the care and protection of both mother and child. Firstly, it was imperative to provide appropriate conditions for a healthy childbirth, excellent care for the two during the first few vital weeks of the child's life, and the possibility of feeding the baby herself without risk of loss of pay. In addition, the state should build refuges for expectant and nursing women, arrange medical consultations for both mother and child, and create a network of childcare services so the mother could continue work. The next step would be to establish a short working day, break periods and safer labour practices for women returning to the workforce. And finally, the last important step forward in solving the motherhood problem would be for the state to guarantee sufficient material assistance to mothers during pregnancy, birth, and the nursing period. Kollontai saw these steps as practical ways for the socialist state to help mothers overcome the difficulties forced upon them. Although she stated that the revolution would have to be complete to ensure the proper provision and protection of both mother and child, as Commissar for Social Welfare Kollontai had provided examples of legislative reform to relieve women immediately.

Love and Sexuality

Kollontai is especially known for her concept of 'free love'. It's a concept which isn't give its due analysis by Marxists because of its alleged irrelevance to the class struggle. Kollontai began with the premise that "the isolated family unit is the result of the modern individualistic world, with its rat-race, its pressures, its loneliness; the family is a product of the monstrous capitalist system." This summarises the effect that capitalism has on social relations (which may seem like an extreme view of urban life, but there is no doubt that many in the Western world can relate to this since the rise of neoliberalism).

In *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*, Kollontai wrote that the move away from a collective to an individual society has led to a widespread "loneliness of spirit" where even though those in the cities are surrounded constantly by other people, we feel a sense of deep loneliness that can only be alleviated with by finding our chosen loved one or 'soul-mate.' Kollontai believed when significant others are found, the capitalistic property relations affect the way they treat one-another, as if "extending the concept of property rights to include the right to the other person's whole spiritual and emotional world." She called this the 'sexual crisis' which is especially prominent in the way men are taught to view women, as the concept of marriage is thought to signify the possession of a wife. Often understated by Marxists, this is an example of how a society's social and productive relations impact on an aspect of life that seems completely removed from economic analysis. And bourgeois ideology holds that monogamous relationships and the idea of the soul-mate are 'natural', but they are of course historically specific concepts that are based on the underlying social and economic structures created by the social conditions of that given time.

Kollontai also discusses the topic of sexuality which was then unexplored by Marxists, as well as most female authors for that matter. In a brief but controversial passage in her *Theses on Communist Morality in the Sphere of Marital Relations* Kollontai wrote that "the sexual act must be seen not as something shameful and sinful but as something which is as natural as the other needs of a healthy organism, such as hunger and thirst" and that this phenomena must not be judged as moral or immoral. Kollontai received a lot of condemnation for this progressive statement, with the most notable critic being Lenin. Misinterpreting Kollontai's point, he wrote that the theory of the satisfaction of sexual desires as being as simple and unimportant as drinking a glass of water under communist society, was completely "un-Marxist." However it appears that Kollontai is first and foremost challenging the cultural at-

titudes surrounding sex, saying that sexuality is natural and should not be considered shameful, as many of that period judged it to be. If Lenin had read more carefully, he would have seen that Kollontai did not support the idea of excessive sexual activity, but rather, that she believed a balance was necessary. She writes that sexual restraint should not be permitted (unless the person is not yet of a mature age), but as well as this, that too much sex could be harmful to the workers' collective. Kollontai was one of the only Marxists addressing sexuality as a political issue, after having read pioneering psychologists' work whilst in exile in 1918. At this time Lenin disapproved of her views on 'free love' and by 1923 they were denounced as 'bourgeois' and 'decadent.' Many contemporary Marxists continue to hold the standpoint that sexual politics are a mere distraction from the class struggle. However, from a feminist perspective Kollontai's contributions on sexuality are extremely important as they offer an idea of communist sexual relations.

Kollontai's focal point in her analysis of romantic and sexual relations was that of the collective. She argued that the isolation of the "couple" as a special unit does not fit within the interests of communism, and that instead the strengthening of feelings of solidarity should be encouraged within the work collective. Young people should be taught firstly that love is only one aspect of life and that communist morality encourages "many and varied bonds of love and friendship among people." She writes that encouraging an expanded concept of love allows for greater intellectual and emotional development of the individual, which leads to more meaningful relationships with others, and ultimately has a positive impact on the collective as a whole.

This is a very radical notion of love that is focused entirely on the good of the collective, rather than the capitalist emphasis on the individual. It also comes from the belief that humans are not innately jealous or possessive, and rather that under different social and economic conditions, it is possible to have positive relationships. Where critics may say this is an idealistic approach to humanity, it is an example of the socialist view that the majority of people are not inherently selfish or malevolent, but our qualities are a construct that is shaped by the transient conditions of social existence. Kollontai's writing on love and sexuality is some of her most valued work, as such subjects were too often neglected by Marxists, yet these are obviously important issues.

In conclusion

Although women's suffrage was one of the most central demands of the first wave

of feminism, within contemporary socialist theory, it was less significant. However, Clara Zetkin devoted a vast amount of time arguing for women's electoral rights. She believed that the political equality of women was necessary to bring about a social revolution that would ensure true equality for all. In the meantime, however, legislative reforms were acceptable as a means to a revolutionary end. Here lies the difference between bourgeois feminism and socialist feminism: the former's goal is to attain equality with men, and every suggestion for change is a reform within the overarching capitalist framework. Socialist feminists instead see inherent problems within the system, and aim to create a transformation of the very structural basis of society; with the end result being universal equality and the liberation of all.

Engels and Bebel made a historical analysis of the family, and the effects that the rise of a productive surplus had on kinship ties. Both argued that the concentration of surplus wealth within the family and the establishment of private property led to the oppression of women, as did the abolition of matrilineal descent and the introduction of monogamy. The answer Engels proposed was for the movement of women's labour into the public sphere, which meant turning domestic labour into a social industry, so as to free up women's time. Although this was a valid solution to the 'marriage problem' and a step forwards toward women's emancipation, there are still issues within this topic that cannot always be adequately discussed through a strictly economic analysis.

Whilst the socialist analysis has clearly recognised unequal power relationships within the family under capitalism, sexual violence is yet to be widely examined through a Marxist or economic framework. This is where more recent sociology and feminist theory can advance the analysis.

In regards to the motherhood problem Kollontai offered concrete solutions by way of legislative reform to help provide and protect both the mother and child. Perhaps reflecting the period, there was still a rigid adherence to traditional gender roles. Rather than encouraging men into the domestic sphere until capitalist relations are entirely broken, the idea centres on bringing women into public industry. Although socialising domestic labour and childcare is a plausible option after the revolution, in the meantime, we have seen women become overloaded as they are expected to function in both spheres. Here the tendency to focus on "after the revolution" answers to problems that need immediate attention is again found within Marxist analysis.

Lastly, Kollontai identified a problem with the current form of relationships and how they are based on the capitalistic concept of private property and possession. She challenged preconceived notions of the form a romantic relationship should take, and

instead insists on a healthier idea of love, that creates a more positive and cohesive workers' collective. Furthermore, her views on sexuality are progressive for her time, as she writes that sex is should not be seen as shameful, or immoral, but instead as a natural part of humanity. These contributions are still very important for developing proletarian theory.

Woman, just as any other oppressed group, could not, and cannot wait forever for the distant revolution. Instead cultural attitudes should continue to be challenged, just as long as the ultimate goal of a radical reorganisation of society's productive and social relations are not sacrificed or forgotten.

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What is work? Wage labour, unpaid work and feminism

By Ian Anderson with contributions by Kassie Hartendorp.

Labour, or work, is central to historical materialist (or Marxist) views of history. Stereotypically, this means only caring about men wearing overalls and working in factories. However, factory labour is only one form of wage labour, which in turn is only one form of labour.

Labour is the sum total of human activities that reproduce social existence. Work keeps us alive, nourished, able to participate in human society. In *The German Ideology*, Marx argued that the “first historical act” is the “production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.”

Labour includes, but is not limited to, wage labour. Unpaid labour in the home – cooking, cleaning, caring for children, the sick and elderly – reproduces our social existence. This unpaid domestic labour, including housework, has been termed “re-productive labour.”

Women still do the bulk of reproductive labour under capitalism. Surveys of unpaid work are not collected often, showing the priorities of the ruling class. However, 2009/2010 Time Use Surveys show that while women and men perform similar hours of work, the majority of men's work is paid, while the majority of women's work is unpaid.

Given the onslaught of attacks on both paid and unpaid workers, it is necessary to understand the relationship between wage labour, unpaid work, and unemployment. As women work the majority of unpaid hours, this understanding is also necessary to



Labour is central to a Marxist view of history

reconciling socialist and feminist demands.

Wage labour, unemployment and unpaid domestic labour

Wage labour is one form of labour, central to capitalist production. Wage labour was generalised in recent centuries by the violent global dispossession of land and resources, forcing the vast majority to labour for a propertied minority. Labour by the majority produces the value which capitalists rely on, value which is the seed of working class power.

State and capital use unemployment to control the demands of wage labour. This is a deliberate, stated strategy. Suzanne Snively, member of the Reserve Bank Board of Directors during the crucial attack period of 1985-1992 states:

“It was a manageable thing for the Reserve Bank to use employment, and unemployment, as the way to get wages down... So they used it.”

When unionised McDonalds workers plan to strike during a breakdown in negotiations, managers say they'll be fired. Although this threat is strictly illegal, it reveals



Aged care workers on strike.

the underlying logic of unemployment for the capitalist class. Demanding full employment unites the needs of unemployed workers and wage workers.

However, beneficiary advocates such as MANA's Sue Bradford distinguish between unemployed workers (who are seeking full-time work, and may or may not rely on a benefit) and beneficiaries (who due to physical or mental impairments, or parental commitments, are unable to commit to full-time work). Beneficiary-bashing deliberately blurs the line between these categories.

Women on the Domestic Purposes Benefit work full-time to raise children. Similarly, spouses who work to feed families entirely on their partner's wage do not register as unemployed, because they are not seeking full-time work.

There are two main differences between 'housework' and wage labour:

1. Housework is largely unpaid
2. Unpaid housework does not directly produce profits for capitalists

Slaves are also unpaid; both historically, and currently throughout much of the majority world. Every class society has relied, at least in part, on unpaid labour.

The question of housework and profits is more complicated. The labour of unpaid domestic workers realises the value of commodities; cleaning fluids, appliances, ingredients, and numerous other products. Domestic labour in turn reproduces the existence of wage labourers. Arguably this sets the price of labour power, by mediating between



wages and the price of domestic commodities.

Women also perform the majority of 'voluntary work,' unpaid labour for organisations. This could include staffing a soup kitchen, providing support for youth, collecting funds for striking workers, or dispensing evangelical literature.

Voluntary work fills in the cracks (or gaping chasms) in the system; trauma, hunger, ecological damage. In capitalist terms, these cracks are 'externalities,' not directly relevant to producing profit and therefore taken up by volunteers.

At worst, voluntary work can operate according to principles of 'charity.' Charity encourages passivity, by addressing symptoms and obscuring causes. At best, voluntary work can operate according to principles of 'solidarity.' Solidarity supports mutual self-activity, to overcome oppression and exploitation.

In the neoliberal era of capitalism, participation in voluntary work has lessened, while women's participation in wage labour (always an aspect of capitalism) has increased. As women participate in wage labour, they also participate in industrial struggles, including the recent strike wave of aged care workers in Aotearoa.

At the same time, many women have taken on the 'double-shift' of wage work and housework. Women still perform most unpaid labour.

Capitalism and patriarchy: parallel systems?

In a seminal 1979 essay, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, Heidi Hartmann argues that feminism has been subordinated to Marxism in most attempts: "The 'marriage' of marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law : marxism and feminism are one, and that one

is marxism."

On the flipside, feminism without socialism is often "blind to history." Hartmann suggests that capitalism and patriarchy are parallel systems, requiring a socialist-feminist response.

Where housework is not directly waged or salaried, proving whether or not it produces profit is a blind alley. Through commodification, all acceptable activities in capitalist society (including sport, music, even watching television) increasingly support the production of economic value, and the reproduction of social existence.

The dominant system is both an economic and a social relation. Central aspects of women's subordination in the private sphere, such as sexual violence, cannot be easily reduced to economics.

Hartmann argues that patriarchy rests on men's control of women's labour, maintained through sexual control of women's bodies. Sexual control could take the form of intimate partner abuse, denial of reproductive rights, denial of the right to self-identification of gender and sexuality.

Patriarchy predates capitalism. Even Friedrich Engels, key collaborator of Marx, argued that the first historic division of labour was the division between men and women. However, patriarchy has found a new, historically specific form under capi-

talism, with the division between wage labour and the private sphere.

Although men would ultimately benefit from the creation of an egalitarian society, we often defend our limited privileges within this system when challenged. These daily privileges include more control over our own bodies, less unpaid commitments, and therefore more leisure time than women.

If patriarchy and capitalism are parallel systems, socialism and feminism must be parallel responses.

Feminism: from patriarchy to kyriarchy?

More recently, feminists have moved from the concept of 'patriarchy' (rule of the father) to 'kyriarchy' (rule of the master/lord). Kyriarchy is often conceived as a pyramid, with the most powerful at the top and the least powerful at the bottom.

Kyriarchy describes a complex web of power structures, recognising intersecting oppressions including racism, transphobia, homophobia and disability. This concept uses 'intersectionality' as a framework to describe and understand how forms of oppression reinforce each-other. For example, it takes into account that a white able-bodied woman, may have more power in Western society than a black, disabled man.

Although this framework is useful in overcoming the one-sidedness of previous approaches to understanding oppression, it has some limitations. Firstly, the concept takes 'domination' or 'rule' out of any defined historical context, and secondly it doesn't distinguish identity from economic relations.

By naming the problem as 'domination' or 'rule,' kyriarchy theory leaves crucial questions unanswered about how societies produce particular forms of oppression. Capitalism emerged out of a particular historical context; not all societies have been capitalist. Patriarchy has also taken a new form in the capitalist era. Historical materialist, or Marxist, analysis helps to understand the 'historical specificity' of social structures, the way 'everything flows and nothing stays.'

Kyriarchy theory describes oppression in terms of personal identity. This approach understands class, and 'classism,' in terms of the privilege experienced by a wealthy individual, or the oppression experienced by a poor individual. It conceives class as one of many identities making up the pyramid.

Marxists understand class as an economic relation more than an identity. Class is defined by ownership of the means of production, (land, factories, people) with the majority lacking ownership. Gender, by contrast, is mainly an identity, which is par-



tially but not entirely autonomous from class. A given individual woman can climb to (or near) the top rung of the pyramid and remain identified as a woman. By definition, a given worker cannot reach the top and remain a worker, unless we demolish the pyramid.

Class and identity-based oppression are deeply entwined. Oppressed groups overwhelmingly lack ownership of the means of production (only 4% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women). However, these struggles and experiences are far from homogeneous. As African American socialist-feminist Angela Davis asks:

"How can we be together in a unity that is not simplistic and oppressive? How can we be together in a unity that is complex and emancipatory?"

If socialists do not recognise and work to address daily disparities, for example by considering the needs of primary caregivers in political organising, unity will be simplistic and oppressive.

Our class politics must complement our intersectional feminist politics, neither subsuming the other.



What is to be done?

In response to the combined state offensive against wage workers and beneficiaries, socialists must draw the necessary links between social movements (including gender liberation and beneficiary advocacy) and industrial struggles. Wage workers are not 'more important' than other oppressed groups, however the fusion of wider social struggles with industrial power is needed to actually overturn this system.

Currently, struggles both by paid and unpaid workers are mainly defensive; maintaining hard-won rights where possible. Transformative politics must move from defence to offence, by actively building the strength of struggles on the ground, and by raising demands that link current experiences with the road to socialism.

Socialists have called for free public childcare, fully-funded education, free public restaurants, and public responsibility for all forms of reproductive work. These demands remain relevant. Ultimately, a democratically planned system could work to meet social needs collectively, rather than relegating them to unpaid private labour.

Connected to the liberation of private reproductive labour, socialists must support the generalised liberation of bodies from gendered control. This includes self-determination in medicine, (reproductive rights, fully funded gender-reassignment) combating rape culture, and defending survivor support services. While raising these long-term demands on the system, socialist-feminists must also develop an anti-sexist praxis in our daily work. In part this means considering the immediate needs of women, and parents, here and now – not just after the revolution.

Why you should get involved the Fightback

1. We are revolutionary socialists

We all live in a capitalist society, which means that the working-class majority experience exploitation and poverty in order to guarantee profits and luxury for the ruling-class minority. The capitalists have many weapons at their disposal – not just the army, police, courts and prisons, but a system of ideas, developed over centuries, that shape people's beliefs about what is normal, natural, and possible. These prevailing ideas tell us that we can do no more than tinker with the current system. However, the current economic crisis shows more clearly than ever that society must be radically reorganised if it is to serve the interests of the working-class majority. To challenge the entrenched power of the ruling class, workers cannot rely on parliament or parties like Labour, which support the existing system. We need to build a movement which can develop alternative, anti-capitalist ideas to create a revolution.

2. We support workers' resistance

The fundamental basis of our politics is class struggle. For us, socialism – a society in which the means of producing wealth are owned collectively and run democratically for the benefit of everyone – can only come about when we, the people who produce the wealth, liberate ourselves from capitalist exploitation. Fightback does everything it can to support all workers' struggles – from the smallest work stoppage to a full-on factory occupation – as these are the basic forms of resistance to capitalist rule. As workers start running their workplaces and industries on their own, they will start to ask, "Why can't we run the whole country – and more?" We take inspiration from historical examples of workers' control such as the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution, and study their successes and failures.

3. We support trade union activism

Because we believe that only the working class can create socialism, we are active in the basic organisations of the working class, the trade unions. Cur-

rently, unions are generally dominated by middle-class bureaucrats who see themselves as peacemakers between workers and bosses. We work towards transforming unions into strong, democratic, fighting organisations, controlled by their members. Such unions will mobilise workers for struggle in the workplace and society through strikes, workplace occupations and other forms of militant action. In an economic crisis they are more important than ever. We join in the struggle to extend the union movement to the majority of workers who are not yet organised, especially the campaigns by Unite Union to involve youth and workers who have insecure conditions. We stand with workers in struggle for better rights and conditions, and initiate discussion on revolutionary ideas through strike bulletins and electronic media.

4. We support student-worker solidarity

On campus and in schools, Workers Party members are actively trying to rebuild the radical student movement. We oppose fees, demand living grants for students, and fight for free speech. We encourage students to link their struggles with those of the working class. Workers ultimately pay most of the bill for education, even in a semi-private university system such as we have. Workers will be won to the idea of free education from

kindergarten to university if they see students willing to support their struggles.

5. We have an internationalist perspective

Workers all over the world have far more in common with one another than with the bosses of "their own" country. To fight effectively, workers in every country must support the struggles of workers in every other country. This is what we mean by internationalism. We are for open borders as the best way to unite the workers of the world. We have been involved in successful campaigns to prevent the deportation of refugees and we urge the union movement to be migrant-worker friendly. We oppose the reactionary nationalism of campaigns like "Buy NZ-made", and instead advocate protecting jobs through militant unionism.

6. We oppose imperialism

The fight against imperialism is a vital part of the fight against capitalism. Imperialism is the system whereby rich countries dominate poor ones. New Zealand is a junior partner in the world imperialist system. Fightback opposes any involvement in imperialist wars such as those being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, even if the involvement is under



the banner of so-called “peace-keeping”. We demand an immediate end to the interference in the affairs of Pacific Island nations by New Zealand and its ally Australia. We want an end to all involvement in imperialist military alliances and the dismantling of their spy bases. We try to identify the most politically progressive anti-imperialist groups to offer them our active support.

7. We fight oppression

We are serious about actively fighting oppression based on nation, race, gender or sexuality – here and now, not just “after the revolution”. But we believe class is central to all such oppression, and therefore those struggles are linked to the broader class struggle. We support militant direct action by Maori for real equality; conversely, we see the Treaty process as a bureaucratic means to undercut such resistance and nurture a Maori middle class which will benefit very few.

8. We stand for freedom

We believe that socialism means the maximum possible freedom for the many not the few. We directly challenge infringements on basic human rights such as the undemocratic use of trespass orders by universities and employers against activists and trade unionists. We have consistently opposed the so-called “terror raids” on left-wing and Maori activists dating from October 2007. We also practise what we preach in our own party, where members have the right to disagree and debate their differences, provided they are involved in a basic level of party activity.

9. We hold capitalism responsible for the environmental crisis

The capitalist drive for unlimited profit threatens to destroy the whole basis of life on Earth. In contrast to the capitalist parties (including the Green Party) who demand that workers reduce their living standards for the sake of the planet, we say that it is the capitalist system that must be challenged, since most environmental damage is a result of production, not consumption. We look to examples of working-class actions like the “green bans” initiated by New South Wales building labourers in the 1970s for inspiration on how workers can change the

priorities of society.

10. We are building a revolutionary party

We believe that the working class and oppressed can only achieve liberation as a conscious project, based on ideas which are debated, tested against reality, and constantly reviewed and improved. The working class can only learn from history – including previous workers’ struggles, victorious or defeated – through a conscious political movement which preserves these lessons. To create a mass socialist movement, workers who have already drawn revolutionary conclusions must organise together in a political organisation. This kind of party is still some way off in New Zealand. But we believe that Fightback activists and our political ideas will be central to that movement of the future. Help us build it now! Our members and supporters in the trade unions, the student movement, and many other struggles organise together, on the basis of common ideas, as part of a concerted fight for a classless society without oppression or exploitation. If you agree with our basic ideas, join us. If you don’t, work with us, debate with us, and continue the discussion!

www.fightback.org.nz

Fightback website is where you'll find interesting commentary on a daily basis, and in-depth articles posted several times a week.

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